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Alan Yu

Pidgins and Creoles

Pidgin and Creole languages traditionally fall under the study of contact languages. Contact languages are ubiquitous in all parts of the world; China, with its diversity of languages within and beyond the Sinitic family, as well as its rich history of migration, conquest and foreign invasion, is no exception.

The question of whether we find bona fide pidgin and Creole languages in China is purely a definitional matter. It has been suggested that there is only one reasonably defendable definition of Creole (or any other) language, namely a socio-historical one (Mufwene 2001). In this strict sense, if we define Creole languages as those arising during the century of Western colonization of significant areas of the Atlantic and the Pacific, then only some of the languages discussed below fall into the category. However, if we accept a more flexible definition, according to which any language that results from the mixing of more than two languages and shows significant grammatical restructuring can be called pidgin or Creole, all languages discussed below qualify. Under this latter definition, the difference between pidgins and Creoles lies in the fact that, while the former are restricted codes, with simple grammatical rules and significant variation, the latter are fully-fledged codes, with grammatical complexity appropriate for the typological input that goes into their formation (Lefebvre 2011).

Under certain proposed definitions of Creole language, Chinese languages present an interesting case. Being typically isolating in nature, and not featuring the inflectional morphology of agglutinative languages, Chinese comes curiously close to a Creole prototype. This view has been discredited as being primarily a Eurocentric view that does not take into account the typically isolating nature of many substrate grammars that have historically contributed to the formation of Creoles around the world (Givón 1979; Ansaldo 2007; 2009). The alleged morpho-syntactic simplicity of Chinese (or other isolating languages) does not, in my view, qualify Chinese varieties as overall simpler languages, as they can be shown to be semantically and phonologically more complex than non-isolating, non-tonal languages (Ansaldo and Matthews 2001). This is however still widely debated.

1. Pidgins

Possibly the best known varieties in this category are two pidgins that used to be spoken until the late 20th century as trade jargons for intercultural communication: (i) Chinese Pidgin English, also known as China Coast Pidgin and (ii) Chinese Pidgin Russian.

Chinese Pidgin English (CPE) developed as a trade language between Western and Chinese traders along the Pearl River delta starting from the 18th century. Not only was it used in West-China transactions but it also became a lingua franca among Chinese of different linguistic background as well as among Western traders of different nationality. CPE was spoken until the end of the last century. It is somewhat unique in the history of pidgins for the following reasons: (a) it existed in a written form, as we know from a number of booklets (language instruction manuals) that circulated in the 19th century among the Chinese. In these phrase books Chinese characters are used phonetically to render the syllables of CPE, often accompanied by a Chinese and an English translation (Ansaldo *et al.* 2010). (b) It was used over a vast area, covering not only many coastal towns of Southern and Eastern China, but also many inland cities and trading posts. A significant

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part of the lexicon is of English origin, though a few Portuguese items are also found, as well as words from Chinese languages. Grammatically it is predominantly Chinese, typically basically lacking inflection, but also lacking tone. A great variety of structures can be found in what is possibly a continuum of forms from a more Anglophone (used primarily among Western traders and showing strong lexifier influence) to a more Sinophone (used primarily among Chinese traders and heavily influenced by Sinitic substrate varieties) pidgin.

Chinese Pidgin Russian (CPR) probably developed no later than the early 18th century along the eastern fringes of the Chinese-Mongolian border as a medium of interethnic communication between Chinese, Russian and Altaic traders. It probably originated in the border town of Kyakhta/Maimachin but eventually spread along the border as well as eastwards all the way to Harbin (Hā'ěrbīn 哈爾濱) following the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway. Some knowledge of it is still retained in older generations of Siberians and Chinese-Russian families. A number of textbooks and phrasebooks are believed to have circulated; it is interesting to note that this pidgin was widely used despite the fact that Chinese-Russian bilinguals were not uncommon, as both languages were actually taught in the region. Russian influence is clear in lexicon and, to a degree, morphology. Chinese influence is limited, mostly noticeable in phonotactics and, to some extent, syntax. Syntactically there is a significant influence from Tungusic and Mongolian as well (Shapiro 2010). It is possible that some forms of this pidgin are still in use in a number of Chinese cities such as Harbin (p.c., Paiyu Zhang, Fall 2010).

Mongolian Pidgin Chinese (MPC) is a variety about which much less is known. It dates back to the Yuán dynasty and features a Northern Chinese (Hàn 漢) lexical base with grammatical influences from both Chinese and Mongolian. The latter was especially prominent in the Tense and Aspect system which features both aspect markers as well as postverbal auxiliary verbs (Zu 2007). MPC is said to have been very variable with unstable basic word order. It is believed to have originated in the intense Hàn-Mongolian contacts of the period which also involved some degree of intermarriage.

2. Creoles

The number of varieties in which something akin to admixture between three or more languages takes place must be overwhelming in China. Usually this happens under conditions typical of Creole formation, i.e., migration, colonization, or intermarriage. Consider that China's borders have been fertile grounds for intensive exchanges with languages of the Altaic, Tibeto-Burman, and Austro-Tai families. Languages of the Altaic type have played a significant and official role in at least a millennium of Chinese dynastic histories. Tibeto-Burman groups are likely to be more ancient than Hàn Sinitic ones in many parts of China. And Austro-Tai peoples, probably the original inhabitants of Fújiàn and the deep south, are still present in those regions as highly multilingual groups, and are, to some extent, linguistically influential groups. Within China the differences between the so-called dialects are significant and there must be a high degree of dialect contact that results in hybridized varieties (Escure 1997; Dede 2007). Mandarin itself might display the effects of language contact, at least in terms of word order where it allows for more OV structures than other Sinitic types, possibly under the spell of Altaic verb-final structures. However, little is know in detail about this wealth of contact varieties; what follows serves just as illustration from a corner of the Gānsù-Qīnghǎi region off the border with Inner Mongolia of what might be a much more diffuse state of affairs.

2.1 *Wǔtún* 五屯

Probably the most striking example of a Creole of China is Wǔtún, a hybrid of Chinese, Tibetan and Mongolian spoken in Tóngrén 同仁 (Qīnghǎi). It probably developed in a community of Chinese Muslims that migrated from the area of Nánjīng 南京 as early as the 16th century. Various factors contributed to the language shift: the community converted to Lamaism and thus exposed themselves to (Bǎo'ān 保安)

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Mongolian; they acquired the lingua franca of the region, → Tibetan. There was also intermarriage with local women, though the influence of this on the history of the language is unclear. Linguistically, Chinese influence is mostly lexical (albeit without tones). Grammatically it is mostly Altaic with some Tibetan influences. Tibetan and Mongolic influences are found in morphology though there are unique Wǔtún developments in this area of grammar. Word-order is verb final; a case system with ten distinctions is found that utilizes a mixed set of markers from all three contributing languages (Wurm 1995).

2.2 *Hèzhōu* 賀州 *and Dǎohuà* 倒話

Another relatively well-known Creole of China, Hèzhōu functions as an indigenous variety as well as a lingua franca in the Línxià 臨夏 autonomous region of Gānsù. This variety developed as a result of Turkic traders acquiring Chinese words but retaining a Turkic grammatical structure. It is lexically Chinese while its grammar derives mostly from Turkic. Tones seem to be disappearing. Verbal inflection has been lost while in the nominal domain there is a developed case system (see also Tángwāng 唐汪 in Wurm 1995:819).

Dǎohuà is a → mixed language of Chinese and Tibetan origins, allegedly developed through intermarriage. It is spoken in Tibetan areas settled by Hàn colonists.

2.3 *Makista*

Makista (or Macanese) can be classified as a Portuguese-based Creole. It used to be spoken in → Macau and possibly around the Pearl River delta before CPE displaced it as a lingua franca. Makista is closely related to Malayo-Portuguese varieties such as Papia Kristang, once spoken in Melaka. The Malay influence is noticeable both in lexicon and grammar, especially in the rich reduplication patterns. That Makista also has been influenced by Cantonese is clear at the lexical level even though a majority of the lexicon is clearly of Portuguese origin (see Ansaldo 2009). Though the language is no longer in daily use, vernacular literature, music, and theatre plays in Makista are still produced on a regular basis.

3. Past Contacts Outside China

Chinese-influenced contact languages exist beyond the borders of China. Historically, the robust presence of Chinese merchants along the northern coast of Java since the 14th century led to a number of mixed Sino-Javanese communities where creolized varieties emerged. The best known of these is Baba Malay, still spoken in some Peranakan communities of Southeast Asia (Lim 1988; Ansaldo 2007). Baba Malay combines Malay and Hokkien lexicon, the latter influence particularly strong in kinship terms and the pronominal system, with a predominantly Malay phonology (there are no tones), and a mixed Malay-Chinese grammar. A contemporary Creole-like variety of the region is → Singapore English, also known as Singlish, lexically English but grammatically Sinitic. Singlish has been called a 'creoloid' in the attempt to differentiate it from what are perceived to be *bona fide* Creole languages (Platt 1975). More recently it has been suggested that Singlish might be seen as a product of typological congruence (Ansaldo 2004; 2009) or as resulting from a process akin to relexification (Bao 2001).

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Umberto Ansaldo

Pínghuà 平話 Dialects

Pínghuà 平話 refers to a group of Sinitic dialects that are primarily spoken in Guǎngxī Zhuàng Autonomous Region 廣西壯族自治區 in Southern China. People in Nánníng 南寧, the capital of Guǎngxī, traditionally recognize four speech varieties spoken in the area: *Guān Píng Tǔ Bái* 官平土白, referring to Mandarin, Pínghuà, Zhuàng, and Cantonese respectively. Zhāng Jūnrú 張均如 (1982) first argued that Pínghuà is not → Yuè 粵 Chinese while comparing the phonologies of Sino-Zhuàng (Chinese loanwords in Zhuàng), Pínghuà and Nánníng Cantonese (a variety of Yuè). The awareness of Pínghuà within Sinitic linguistics was raised considerably when the *Language Atlas of China* (Würm and Lǐ Róng *et al.* 1987) listed Pínghuà separately from Yuè. The most salient historical phonological feature that distinguishes Pínghuà from Cantonese and Mandarin is that in most Pínghuà dialects, the Middle Chinese voiced obstruents are devoiced and unaspirated, whereas in Cantonese and Mandarin they are also devoiced, but aspirated or unaspirated depending on which tone the syllable has. While Pínghuà is clearly different from varieties of Cantonese in the area like Nánníng Cantonese, the status of Pínghuà as a subgroup independent from Yuè is controversial.

The Pínghuà dialects are commonly divided into Southern Pínghuà (*Guìnán Pínghuà* 桂南平話) and Northern Pínghuà (*Guìběi Pínghuà* 桂北平話). The phonology of Southern Pínghuà bears similarities with Cantonese and many other Yuè dialects: it is relatively conservative in retaining all six ancient codas -m -n -ŋ -p -t -k, and there are at least three entering (*rù* 入) tones. In contrast, the phonology of Northern Pínghuà has been Mandarinized: -m -p -t -k no longer exist, and there are fewer tones (but still more tones than the four or five tones in the Southwestern Mandarin spoken in Guǎngxī). The Pínghuà dialects spoken in the suburbs and villages around Nánníng and Guìlín 桂林 (the current and previous capitals of Guǎngxī, respectively) are the most famous varieties of Southern and Northern Pínghuà, respectively. Qín Yuǎnxióng (2007) estimates the number of speakers of Southern Pínghuà as 2.19 million, and Northern Pínghuà as 1.76 million. Historically, Pínghuà had strong influence over nearby non-Sinitic languages. For instance, the older layers in the phonologies of Sino-Vietnamese and Sino-Zhuàng resemble Southern Pínghuà more than other Sinitic varieties.

1. Distribution and History of Pínghuà

Pínghuà speakers have mostly settled along transportation routes; this relatively linear distribution is a witness to the major migration pathways of Pínghuà people. An important migration event occurred during the Northern Sòng dynasty: in 1053 CE, a war was waged between Sòng and the polity of *Daihnamz* 大南 (Mandarin Dànán), headed by the Zhuàng leader Nungz Ciqgau 儂智高 (Mandarin Nóng Zhìgāo), near Nánníng. Many Pínghuà people claim that they are the descendents of these Sòng soldiers,

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